

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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The Philippine Military: Will They Remain in the Barracks?

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Summary

Although no organized coup plotting is in evidence, morale in the armed forces has deteriorated since the Aquino assassination and some officers are beginning to discuss among themselves the need for military intervention during a succession crisis. A more likely scenario would involve the military being able to convince Marcos to reimpose martial law as the sense of crisis deepened.

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Military Facts

We have very little information regarding the military's likely reactions if a power vacuum develops at the top of the Philippine government. The majority of senior officers owe their positions and are loyal to General Fabian Ver, who was appointed Chief of Staff in 1981. Ver, who gained his position because of personal loyalty to Marcos rather than superior professional competence, has instituted a promotions policy that virtually ensures his control over key military commands. He is dedicated to protecting the First Family.

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Ver's tenure as Chief of Staff has contributed to widespread morale problems within the armed forces, as well as disputes with other high-level military officials, including Deputy Chief of Staff General Fidel Ramos and Defense Minister Juan Ponce-Enrile. Ramos had been Enrile's preferred candidate for Chief of

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Staff, but lost out when Imelda Marcos threw her weight behind Ver. Both Enrile and Ramos subsequently have lost ground to Ver in promotion and assignment decisions that consolidated Ver's control over the senior officer corps. [redacted]

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Recent Confrontations

Political infighting between Ver, Enrile, and Ramos broke out into open conflict last July that required President Marcos's personal intervention and contributed to Ver's decision to cancel a scheduled trip to the United States. The confrontation sparked widespread speculation that high level changes in the military establishment were in the offing. We believe that the Aquino assassination necessitated putting these moves on the back burner in the interest of maintaining government unity during the crisis, but the episode may have led Ramos and Enrile to reexamine their post-Marcos options. [redacted]

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The durability and strength of the Ramos-Enrile alliance is questionable and, in fact, there may be no formal alliance. Ramos's untarnished image, however, makes him a politically attractive ally. US officials claim that he is the only officer who has developed an independent power base in the armed forces based on personal competence and professional respect. Moreover, widespread public perceptions of Ver's involvement in the Aquino assassination make him a comparatively greater political liability to President Marcos or to anyone else with presidential ambitions. Even Marcos, recognizing Ver's poor public image, has relied heavily on Ramos since the Aquino slaying to make reassuring announcements about government stability. [redacted]

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Maneuvering for Position

Although organized coup plotting is not yet in evidence, we believe that the likelihood of a coup--possibly with the blessings of the business community--will increase as the coalition keeping President Marcos in power continues to fray. [redacted]

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Recent evidence suggests that Ramos may already be seeking the support of Prime Minister Virata who, according to press reports, is distancing himself from the Marcos regime. [redacted]

Ramos requested a meeting with Prime Minister Virata upon his return from IMF negotiations in Washington. We do not know whether the meeting took place or what its purpose was, but [redacted]

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a retired senior officer allied to Ramos met recently with prominent business leaders and politicians to discuss their post-Marcos options. According to the participants, these discussions had Virata's approval. [redacted]

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Even some officers connected to Ver are also now speaking openly about the probable necessity of the military assuming the reins of government in the post-Marcos period. [redacted]

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[redacted] Marcos's serious medical episode in early August undoubtedly triggered these discussions as it graphically reminded them of the President's mortality. Their views, [redacted] apparently are based on their assumption that constitutional succession mechanisms will not survive, and that Prime Minister Virata lacks the political power to preclude a presidential bid by Imelda Marcos. The subsequent chaos and disorder. in this scenario, would require military intervention. [redacted]

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A smaller group more closely allied to Ramos and consisting of majors and colonels believes constitutional mechanisms should be upheld at all cost. However, [redacted]

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[redacted] this group does not command forces that would be able to control events in and around Manila in the event of a crisis. [redacted]

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Outlook

We believe that a further deterioration of the economy, prolonged political turmoil, or another serious medical episode impairing the health of President Marcos could encourage various individuals to seize the initiative and make a bid for power. Although the Philippine military has a tradition of obeying civilian rule, their concerns over political stability and the weaknesses of existing succession mechanisms, combined with their nationalism and heightened political role during nine years of martial law, make it likely that the military will continue to be increasingly involved as events unfold in Manila. At a minimum, the military's concerns could force President Marcos to reimpose martial law if the moderate opposition continues to prove itself capable of keeping the pot boiling as it has so far. Less likely, in our view, military factions could step in and seize power, acting either out of extreme nationalism or self-interest. [redacted]

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In any case, a heightened military role in Philippine politics would not negatively affect US interests. The military as a group has strong ties to the United States based on our historic cooperation and the fact that many senior officers received training here. A shift toward a more nationalistic position appears to be under way among younger officers, however, partly as a result of declining funds for US training of Philippine military personnel during the last decade. [redacted]

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